

THE OSKAR DIETHELM HISTORICAL LIBRARY

OSKAR DIETHELM
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OSKAR DIETHELM HISTORICAL LIBRARY
ANNUAL REPORT
1974

Department of Psychiatry
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New York, New York 10021

The continued support of our many Friends has been essential to the development of the Oskar Diethelm Historical Library. One of the country's finest collections in the history of psychiatry, the Diethelm Library has for the past seventeen years served as the research facility of the Section on the History of Psychiatry and the Behavioral Sciences of Cornell Medical College. At this writing the total collection before 1950 consists of 13052 items. The general distribution of the monograph collection can be seen from the following analysis of our holdings pre 1900. We have 3,031 monographs from the 19th century, 728 from the 18th, 351 from the 17th, 122 from the 16th, and five incunabula. Together with its supplemental reference collection of 3709 related works in medical history, literature, bibliography, philosophy, psychology and psychiatry, the library attracts many interested scholars from other institutions in the U.S. and abroad.

It has long been Dr. Diethelm's belief that a real understanding of modern psychiatry is impossible without a historical perspective. Thus, soon after his arrival at Cornell in 1936 he began collecting important works in the history of psychiatry, some of which go back to mediaeval and classical times. In 1953 these historical and reference materials were placed in a separate library, which has been known by its present name since Dr. Diethelm's retirement in 1962.

The library of the New York Hospital Department of Psychiatry itself goes back to 1823, for when that department moved to Bloomingdale a separate library was set up there so that doctors would not have to travel seven miles downtown to do their reading. Unless we are mistaken, this makes it the oldest separately constituted institutional psychiatric library in the country. The old books from this collection have been placed in the Diethelm Library.

Since 1964 the Friends of the Oskar Diethelm Historical Library have shared in the growth of the original concept. In 1974 we had 108 generous donors in membership. Over the past year, with their help, we have added 253 books, journals, and pamphlets, and 9 prints to the collection.

In recent years we have become increasingly aware of the importance of early literature which while not medical in origin, contributed to our understanding of psychiatric conditions. Always of interest to students of psychopathology and history, material of this kind is especially significant for the early period, where extended case studies, as such, are almost non-existent. Among our recent acquisitions in this area are a broadside advertisement for a pamphlet on the strange case of Amos Wilson, as well as the pamphlet itself:

Anonymous, The Pennsylvania Hermit, a Narrative of the Extraordinary Life of Amos Wilson, who Expired in a Cave, in the Neighborhood of Harrisburgh...After Having therein Lived, in Solitary Retirement, for the Space of Nineteen Years. Philadelphia, 1839.

Wilson seemed an unlikely candidate for anchoritism. Born and raised in Lebanon, Pa., he was considered a "youth of correct habits," meek and modest, respected, and good in his work as stone-cutter's apprentice. He was an affectionate brother to his only sister, Harriot.

The story goes that when she was 18, Harriot became infatuated with a certain Smith, a young man from Philadelphia. Only after she found herself pregnant did she discover that he was already married. Desperate to avoid disgrace, she destroyed the baby at birth. The body was found in a grove in Lebanon and Harriot was immediately suspected and arrested. While infanticide was not uncommon at the time, this particular case aroused great interest owing to the

well known respectability of Harriot and the Wilson family. The evidence against her was considerable, and she was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death. Many distinguished people, including clergymen, tried to obtain a pardon for her, but no one tried harder than Amos Wilson. When all other pleas had failed, Amos, on the very day of the execution, threw himself before the Governor, weeping and begging him to spare Harriot's life. The pardon was at last granted and Amos set out joyously with the precious document. Unfortunately, heavy rains had swelled an intervening river and it was impassible. Amos had no choice but to wait, frantically, until he could risk crossing the river. He finally arrived at the scene, waving the pardon, just five minutes after Harriot, hanging from the rope, had drawn her last breath.

Under the burden of this tragedy Wilson retired to a cave, reading, making millstones, contemplating the goodness of the Almighty, and writing his pamphlet the Sweets of Solitude. Solitude had been made a popular subject by writings of the Swiss physician, Johann Georg Zimmermann. His book, On Solitude (1756; amended and enlarged 1784-85) went through 12 American editions before 1819. One American physician, Benjamin Rush, preferred enforced solitude as a punishment for his children to beatings, while later the Auburn penal system was built on the philosophy of seclusion and solitude.

Other new acquisitions include:

L.F.W.A., A Looking-Glass for Fanatics, American, ca. 1832. This 8-page pamphlet is invaluable as a key to the history of religious insanity in late 18th early 19th century America. The author sets out to prove that the fanatical preacher, "he who is the cause of an excitement which brings dismay, madness and suicide upon his fellow creatures, is himself a cold-blooded murderer." He does this simply by printing 113 capsule-histories. A few are given in almost

clinical detail, while most of the others could probably be researched further, because the unknown "L.F.W.A." was kind enough to mention the sources of his information. The cases had been culled from local daily newspapers and obscure religious periodicals, and would be virtually impossible for the modern scholar to locate otherwise. But the information in this little pamphlet alone, if followed out, would go a long way toward a study of religious insanity.

Fitzhugh Ludlow, The Hasheesh Eater, New York, 1857. Written in the form of a literary narrative, and obviously inspired by De Quincey's English Opium Eater, Ludlow's book reads almost like a promotion vehicle for hashish. The warnings against it are so romantic, and the elaborately described visions so attractive, that it could hardly be otherwise. This is one of the first popular accounts in the United States; a decade earlier, Amariah Brigham, one of the founders of the American Psychiatric Association, was starting his experiments with cannabis indica as a treatment for melancholia. Although optimistic at first, Brigham finally decided the drug had no lasting effect.

Thanks to the generous help of the Siegfried and Josephine Bieber Foundation we have been able to acquire a collection of 42 works from the French 19th century psychiatric-neurological literature, including a number of doctoral dissertations from the era of Pinel and later. This material will make it possible to extend the line of research exemplified in Dr. Diethelm's recent work, Medical Dissertations of Psychiatric Interest Printed before 1750 (Basel: Karger, 1971). Among these works we find an 1804 dissertation by E. Calabre on the influence of education and the passions on nervous illness, and many studies on hysteria. Several of these, although written before Freud's time, deal with the very topic with which he was to create such a furor: the existence of hysteria in the male.

During the year 1974, The Historical Library was fortunate in receiving endowment funds from two sources. The yearly income from these endowments will aid greatly in the future growth of the collection.

The Margaret S. Millhauser Bequest provides for the acquisition of books illustrating the historical development of the concepts of manic and depressive illnesses. Among the purchases made possible is a very scarce book by Thomas Willis (1622-1675), Affectionum quae dicuntur hystericae et hypochondriacae pathologia spasmodica vindicata, (Leiden, 1671). The old terms *hysteria* and *hypochondriasis* cover much of what we know as depression, including such symptoms as despair, suicidal behavior, and bodily delusions.

The Frances S. Cartmell Fund, which was received late in the year, will allow us to strengthen our holdings in general.

Thanks to a generous gift from life-member Mrs. Louise E. Glass we have been able to acquire a copy of Johannes Georg Godelmann's, De Magis, Veneficis et Lamiis Recte Cognoscendis et Puniendis, (On Magicians, Sorcerers and Witches, their Proper Recognition and Punishment, Frankfurt, 1591.) Thorndike, in his History of Experimental Science and Magic, vol. 6, calls this book "a mixture of sanity and credulity, of religious prejudice and a feeling for law and nature." In other words, though fully convinced of the reality of witchcraft, Godelmann took an approach which was more humane than that of Jean Bodin but less than that of early psychiatrist, Johann Weyer. Godelmann regarded witches (unlike magicians and sorcerers) as deluded creatures, and lycanthropy as a type of melancholia or delusion. He was against such judicial procedures as the water test, search for special witches' marks, and confessions through torture. In illustrating the conjunction between witchcraft and mental illness, this book stands as a forerunner of later forensic psychiatry and psychiatric jurisprudence.

Our collection of psychiatric manuscripts and graphics have been supplemented from many sources. This year, Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Blatt made possible the addition of three late eighteenth century prints by James Gillray and also an autographed quotation by J. G. Spurzheim, the early phrenologist. The American Foundation for Mental Hygiene gave us a grant to continue our cataloging of the Clifford E. Beers papers. Miss Emily L. Martin has continued to provide numerous items in the mental health field. The most striking manuscript among her gifts is a 1926 letter from Sigmund Freud in which he discusses the efforts to get his book on lay-analysis translated into English. The New York Psychiatric Society presented us with their minutes book extending from the date of their founding in 1903 to 1909. Dr. Allan McLane Hamilton, Cornell's first professor of psychiatry, called the inaugural meeting, attended by nine eminent New York neuropsychiatrists. Assisted by Mrs. Nathan Straus, we were able to have Marie Rosenthal Hatschek's portrait of Dr. Bernard Sachs cleaned and restored. It now hangs in our reference collection reading room.

In our last annual report we mentioned that the problem of restoring and rebinding some of our older books would soon have to be faced. This year we are happy to say that our librarian Ms. Barbara H. Sutherland, (who is supported by a grant from the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation) having previously consulted with Carolyn Horton and other experts, will begin instituting a conservation program. Up to 10% of the Friends income will be used to finance this.

The support of the Friends of the Oskar Diethelm Historical Library is more important than ever in these times of tightening economic conditions and skyrocketing book prices. Our basic fee is now \$15 per year, although membership can still be granted, if desired, on receipt of smaller amounts. Fortunately most of the classic psychiatric literature is already in our collection,

but we still continue actively to seek ancillary items which round out the collection and add to its value for scholars and medical practitioners.

Our budget allocations are determined by the fact that this is primarily a working research facility rather than a rare book library. Hence we draw a limit on spending, though an occasional extraordinary item may call for special consideration. Where important materials are generally unavailable we can and do obtain microfilms or photocopies.

The Diethelm Library has proved to be an important aid to psychiatrists and historians attempting to achieve a "three-dimensional" understanding of the meaning of mental illness and its treatment. This historical perspective is more valuable than ever in times of rapid change such as the present. While "nothing new under the sun" may not be literally true, still it is remarkable how much guidance Clio, the historical muse, can offer, when the effort is made to consult her. So we ask all of you to join us in supporting this project, and those who are already members can help us still more by making others aware of what we are doing, and if possible by increasing the category of donation. There are also opportunities for longer term contributions which are noted on bookplates giving the name of the donor or the person honored. Gifts of \$5,000 or more to Cornell University Medical College can constitute an endowment fund, which will strengthen the collections year by year and amount to a perpetually growing gift or memorium. Such an endowment may be arranged as a bequest in a will, if preferred.

Once again we sincerely thank all the Friends who have supported us during the past year. We would also like to extend our special thanks to the individuals and institutions who have helped us with various other gifts:

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